

6 actions for governments on gender-based violence and harassment at work

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Leadership from federal, state and local governments is key to ending gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in the world of work. Government representatives should collaborate with employers, workers and unions to develop and implement policies, programs and legislation to address the root causes of GBVH and the needs of survivors who have experienced GBVH in the world of work.

Here are six tools that governments at any level can use to create safer work environments free of GBVH:

Enact policies addressing GBVH in the world of work. Through legislation, Executive Orders, ordinances, resolutions and rulemaking, lawmakers and governments can establish and implement employment protections for workers who experience GBVH, including addressing sexual harassment and the impacts of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking in the world of work. Several states, such as California, have amended their sexual harassment laws to expressly recognize gender-based harassment and require trainings on sexual harassment. Others, such as Delaware, have expanded their laws to cover workers typically left out of protections such as unpaid interns and apprentices, and Connecticut has amended their law to include employers of all sizes, thus covering all workers. Other states have adopted safe leave laws that require employers to provide paid leave from work to eligible employees for seeking services related to violence they and/or their family members have experienced. Ideally, laws should provide robust protections to all workers, including workers who are often left out such as farmworkers, domestic workers and part-time workers.

Establish offices on gender-based violence (GBV). Chicago, Houston and New York City all have created offices on GBV within their mayor's offices. A dedicated office on GBV demonstrates the city's recognition of the prevalence of GBV and the need for leadership and commitment from the government to develop and implement programs and policies to prevent and address GBVH, including in the world of work. The New York City Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) has released a model workplace policy on domestic and gender-based violence that is integrated into all of the city agencies' existing workplace violence prevention programs.

Create strategic plans. Strategic plans provide a clear vision of how governments will take steps to prevent and address GBVH throughout their communities and within workplaces, as well as provide a mechanism for constituents to hold them accountable. For example, the U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence provides an outline for a whole-of-government approach to ending GBV. It includes several actions related to economic security, including addressing harmful work cultures and root causes of gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work. Chicago's Citywide Strategic Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence and Human



Trafficking describes how Chicago's government will increase supportive services, collect data on GBV and shift cultural norms.

Conduct and mandate trainings. Governments can require workers or state employees to complete regular trainings on GBVH in the world of work. Trainings are an important tool because they emphasize that GBVH in the world of work is not an acceptable practice and provide workers with a better understanding of how to respond when GBVH occurs. Connecticut recently passed a law requiring domestic violence training for state agency employees.

Effective trainings should be conducted in person at least once per year for ALL employees. The trainings should be interactive, trauma-informed, survivor-centered and should provide relevant information based on the industry the workers are in. Organizations with experience in trauma-informed GBVH training should create and lead the trainings.

Leverage new or existing funds. Dedicating funding towards ending GBVH in the world of work is one of the most powerful ways to drive sustainable progress. Governments can assess their existing funding streams to see how they can be modified to address GBVH in the world of work. For example, the Women's Bureau (WB) modified one of its existing grant programs, the Fostering Access, Rights and Equity (FARE) grant program, to focus solely on funding community-based organizations working to prevent and address GBVH in the world of work. This narrowed focus on GBVH allows the WB to learn from our grantees about what practices are working on the ground and how we can adapt our approach based on worker and survivor experiences.

Governments can also assess new funding streams to see how addressing GBVH can be incorporated. For example, as funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and CHIPS and Science Act began to flow to the states, federal agencies addressed the need to create jobs free of GBVH by publishing guidance for funding recipients regarding the need to center equity. The U.S. Department of Commerce released the voluntary CHIPS Women in Construction Framework for contractors, unions and other relevant partners to adopt with the goal of increasing women in the construction labor force. The Framework includes guidance to maintain a healthy, safe and respectful workplace that prevents and addresses harassment, discrimination, retaliation and violence.

Gather accurate and representative data. Without data about the prevalence and impact of GBVH on work, it is difficult to clearly identify root causes of GBVH and mitigate the risks and barriers it creates. Additionally, without data, it is challenging to understand how widespread GBVH is among all populations and industries. Governments can gather data on GBVH by either adding questions to existing data sets or creating new studies to investigate specific industries or groups of people.

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